Weak associations between syntactic and morphological finiteness in L2 German: Evidence from elicited imitation

Sarah Schimke, MPI for Psycholinguistics
Negation and finiteness in German

- In German, finite main verbs raise to the left of the negator:

  “Der Junge schreibt nicht”
  The boy write-FIN not

- Non-finite verb forms, such as infinitives and past participles, remain to the right of the negator:

  “Der Junge hat nicht geschrieben”
  The boy has-FIN not write-PP
Verb raising
**Functional categories in L2: Impaired representations hypothesis (IRH)**

- Functional categories are absent in **early stages** of L2 acquisition -> utterance structure is determined by semantic principles

- In **later stages**,  
  - they can not be acquired at all (Meisel, 1997)  
  - they are built up gradually (Vainikka and Young-Scholten, 1996, Dimroth et al., 2003)
Predictions IRH

- **Auxiliaries**: should appear to the left of the negator (for semantic reasons)
  
  “Der Junge hat **nicht** geschrieben”
  
  The boy has (AUX) not written

- **Non-finite lexical verbs**: can appear on either side of the negator
  
  “Der Junge **nicht** schreiben” / “Der Junge schreiben **nicht**”
  
  The boy not write-INF  The boy write-INF not

- **Finite lexical verbs**: can appear on either side of the negator (at least for a certain phase)
  
  “Der Junge **nicht** schreibt” / “Der Junge schreibt **nicht**”
  
  The boy not write-FIN  The boy write-FIN not
Functional categories in L2: Missing surface inflection (MSIH)

• Learners have access to functional categories (Prévost and White, 2000)
  • finite verbs can and have to raise as soon as learners produce them
  • Non-finite verbs remain to the right of the negator
• But: non-finite verbs can be used as default forms in raised positions
Predictions MSIH

- **Auxiliaries**: should appear to the left of the negator (because they are finite)
  
  “Der Junge hat nicht geschrieben”
  
  The boy has (AUX) not written

- **Non-finite lexical verbs**: can appear to either side of the negator
  
  “Der Junge nicht schreiben” / “Der Junge schreiben nicht”
  
  The boy not write-INF The boy write-INF not

- **Finite lexical verbs**: should appear to the left of the negator (because they are finite)
  
  “Der Junge schreibt nicht”
  
  The boy write-FIN not
Aim of the present study

- IRH and MSIH make identical predictions for finite auxiliary verbs and non-finite lexical verbs, but differ in their predictions for finite lexical verbs:
  - Are they consistently placed to the left of the negator, as expected for finite auxiliaries?
  - Or is their placement variable, as is expected for non-finite lexical verbs?
- Aim: systematically compare the placement of these three types of verb forms in production and elicited imitation
**Methods**

- **Participants**: 48 Turkish learners of German, acquisition in an immersion setting
- **Tasks**: Elicited production (film and picture stories retellings) and elicited imitation
- **Analysis**: negated main clauses, 3rd pers. sg., types of verb forms:
  - finite light verbs
  - non-finite lexical verbs (infinitives and past participles)
  - finite lexical verbs (ending on –t)
Elicited Production

Verb placement for different verb types: absolute numbers

Fin - light verbs  Inf – lex. verbs  Fin – lex. verbs

V - neg

neg - V
Verb placement for different verb types: absolute numbers

- **Fin - light verbs**
- **Inf – lex. verbs**
- **Fin – lex. verbs**

- **V - neg**
- **neg - V**
Examples

- **Raised finite light verb (n = 49):**
  “Aber er hat nicht gesprungen”
  but he has (AUX) not jump-PP

- **Unraised non-finite lexical verb (n = 57):**
  “herr grün nicht fallen”
  Mr. green not jump-INF
Examples finite lexical verbs

- **Raised (n=15):**
  “aber herr grün springt nicht”
  but Mr. green jump-FIN not.

- **Unraised (n = 7):**
  “nicht springt”
  not jump-FIN
An effect of proficiency?

Low agr:
< 32%
(n = 24)

High agr:
> 32%
(n = 24)
An effect of proficiency?

Low agr:
< 32% (n = 24)

High agr:
> 32% (n = 24)
Evidence against the MSIH

- Unexpected placement of finite verbs in unraised position at both proficiency levels
- The placement of finite lexical verbs is less systematic than the placement of finite auxiliaries
  -> why?
- The placement of non-finite lexical verbs is NOT more variable than the placement of finite lexical verbs
  -> no evidence for use of non-finite forms as default forms
Evidence against the IRH

- Strong contingency between finiteness and verb placement in both groups
- But: numbers are too low to allow for firm conclusions
Additional evidence from elicited-imitation

- Elicits the same number of data points for every learner and structure
- Controls for use of rote-learnt forms
- Can tap knowledge learners do not yet actively show in their production (Verhagen, 2005)
## Stimuli

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raised</td>
<td>Auxiliary</td>
<td>Das Kind <strong>hat nicht</strong> mit dem Spiel begonnen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unraised</td>
<td>Auxiliary</td>
<td>*Das Kind <strong>nicht hat</strong> mit dem Spiel begonnen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised</td>
<td>Lexical V., Inf.</td>
<td>*Der Junge <strong>schreiben nicht</strong> an die Tante.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unraised</td>
<td>Lexical V., Inf.</td>
<td>*Der Junge <strong>nicht schreiben</strong> an die Tante.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised</td>
<td>Lexical V., Fin</td>
<td>Der Junge <strong>schreibt nicht</strong> an die Tante.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unraised</td>
<td>Lexical V., Fin</td>
<td>*Der Junge <strong>nicht schreibt</strong> an die Tante.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Low agr-group: syntactic changes, morphology maintained

Changed and maintained sentences: absolute numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>aux</th>
<th>non-finite lex v.</th>
<th>finite lex v.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V neg</td>
<td>neg V</td>
<td>V neg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; neg V</td>
<td>&gt; V neg</td>
<td>&gt; V neg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*
Examples

target: Die Schwester **nicht hat** nach dem dünnen Buch gesucht.
The sister **not has** for the thin book searched

response: Die Schwester **hat nicht** diese dünne Buch gesucht.
The sister **has not** this thin book searched.

target: Das Mädchen **gehen nicht** zu der alten Schule.
The girl **go-INF not** to the old school.

response: Das Mädchen **nicht gehen** zur alten Schule.
The girl **not walk-INF** to the old school.
Low agr-group:
morphological changes, syntax maintained

Changed and maintained sentences: absolute numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raised Position</th>
<th>Unraised Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fin neg &gt; inf neg</td>
<td>inf neg &gt; fin neg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neg fin &gt; neg inf</td>
<td>neg inf &gt; neg fin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples

Target: Der Doktor *nicht antwortet* auf den lieben Brief
The doctor *not answer-FIN* to the friendly letter.

Response: Der Mann *nicht antworten* auf der lieber Brief.
The doctor *not answer-INF* to the friendly letter.

Target: Der Mann *tanzt nicht* mit der netten Sekretärin
The man *dance-FIN not* with the nice secretary

Response: Der Mann *tanzen nicht* mit der netten Sekretärin
The man *dance-INF not* with the nice secretary
Summary low agr-group

- **Syntactic changes:**
  - Preference for raised position for auxiliaries
  - No preference for any position for lexical verbs
  - No difference between finite and non-finite lexical verbs

- **Morphological changes:**
  - Small tendency to prefer non-finite over finite forms
  - No interaction with verb position

-> no evidence for functional categories
High agr-group: syntactic changes, morphology maintained

Changed and maintained sentences: absolute numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>aux</th>
<th>non-finite lex v.</th>
<th>finite lex v.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V neg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; neg V</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neg V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; V neg</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changes in high agr-group: syntactic changes, morphology maintained.
Examples

Target: Der Koch *nicht hat* in dem neuen Haus gearbeitet.
The cook not has in the new house worked.

Response: Der Koch *hat nicht* eine neue Haus gearbeitet.
The cook has not a new house worked.

Target: Der Polizist *nicht fahren* zu dem schlimmen Unfall.
The policeman not drive-INF to the bad accident.

Response: Der Polizist *fahren nicht* schlimmen Unfall.
The policeman drive-INF not bad accident.
High agr-group: morphological changes, syntax maintained

Changed and maintained sentences: absolute numbers

![Bar chart showing distribution of sentence changes](chart.png)
Example

Target: Der Präsident leben nicht in der fremden Stadt
The president live-FIN not in the foreign city

Response: Der Präsident lebt nicht in der fremden Stadt
The president live-FIN not in the foreign city
Summary high agr-group

- **Syntactic changes:**
  - general preference for raising over non-raising
  - stronger for auxiliaries than for lexical verbs
  - no difference between finite and non-finite lexical verbs

- **Morphological changes:**
  - preference for finite over non-finite forms in raised position
  - no morphological preferences in unraised position (but this position is generally dispreferred!)
Conclusion: structure-building (Vainikka and Young-Scholten, 1996)

1. VP-stage: no raising
2. FP-stage: optional raising for both morphologically finite and non-finite verbs
3. AgrP-stage: obligatory raising for finite verbs
Conclusion: structure-building

- Low-agr group seems to be in VP-stage
  - Lexical verbs mostly in unraised position
  - Auxiliaries placed and changed to raised position (semantic reasons?)

- Stages “compete” in high-agr group:
  - Many unraised structures in production
  - Preference for raising in imitation
  - When raised, slight preference for finite verbs